

Between Two Worlds
Understanding the Stolen Generations
A GUIDE FOR HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICE PROFESSIONALS

Acknowledgements

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Many members of the Stolen Generations have also been extremely generous with their time and emotions to put this work together, and we thank each and every one of you.

Connecting Home - A Service for the Stolen Generations

Connecting Home Ltd (formerly Stolen Generations Victoria) was established as a result of recommendations arising from the Stolen Generations Taskforce Report 2003. The Taskforce identified the need for an independent, community controlled organisation in Victoria to be established to meet the needs of the Stolen Generations in this state.

Connecting Home seeks to undertake activities that will assist members of the Stolen Generations and engage in public awareness and education. We offer a range of support and referral services to assist our members in reconnecting with family, community, culture and land and most importantly, reconnecting with themselves.

If you were taken from your family, community or culture as a child you can contact Connecting Home for support services, referrals and publications, and to participate in a range of events and activities.

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Introduction by Syd Jackson

Carlton Premiership Player 1970, 1971
Member of the Stolen Generations

It is with great pleasure that I present 'Between Two Worlds', a guide to understanding the Stolen Generations. I'd like to do this not just for me, but for my Mission brothers and sisters throughout Australia. While we're all different, and ours is not the only story important to share, the Stolen Generations experience is a key part of our Australian story and one we all need to understand.

For me, if it wasn't for my football, I know my life as part of Australia's Stolen Generations could have been starkly different.

When I read the official government documents, including arrest warrants for me and my sisters all under 7 years of age, I know I am one of the lucky ones who survived – many didn't. I have at least had a life in football and with good friends, but without the love and connection to my mother, father and sisters.

My mother Amy was a good mother, a loving mother. My father Scotty was a good father who worked hard all his 100 plus years, but because he was a half-caste – therefore his children half-caste - both were considered to be unfit parents and we were forcibly removed from them.

We were taken to a sorting out place, and then split up again. I never saw my sisters again until 20 years later. Many of my Mission friends passed away early because they had a pretty tough life, and even now, I'm forever going to funerals in connection with people I knew at a young age.

I always wonder where I'd be without football. I don't know if I would have had the same opportunities if I hadn't been taken away, and things could have been a lot worse. But I worked hard for what I got and there was also a lot that I lost in terms of my family, culture, my language and important things like that. I had a lot of help from a lot of people who supported me and I worked hard to reward them by not failing.

When I was recruited from East Perth to Carlton in 1968, Aboriginal players were a rarity in the VFL. No doubt the highlight of my career at Carlton was the 1970 Grand Final against Collingwood. We played in front of 121,000 people – still the record crowd at the MCG today.

I'm one of the more fortunate members of the Stolen Generations. I got some support after Mission life. Many didn't. There are many faceless people without identities who did not have access to the social benefits this so-called lucky country had to offer. They just disappeared from the community.

They had police problems, no jobs and just couldn't get on in life and they or their families should be compensated. I don't know what adequate is and it will never be enough because they lost their family, their language and their culture and have been discriminated against all their lives in terms of those social benefits.

I was separated from my sisters for more than 20 years. One has since died, along with my mother and father, who I barely knew and met only twice. In the Missions we were used as slave labour to work the farms that kept the white mission owners in the lifestyle to which they were accustomed.

My exact age cannot be guaranteed as a 1968 letter to the WA Government from the State's last Commissioner of Native Welfare, Frank Gare, shows that 'records for the period 1940 to 1951 state that no reference to the birth of Sydney Jackson can be found.'

It was – and still is, according to all official records – simply assumed that I was born on July 1, 1944. This is a date created for ease of administration by my 'protectors'.



It's important to remember too, that my people were only counted as citizens of this country in 1967. Consider for how long my people were regarded as non-people and regulated under policies and laws of protection and assimilation that were undoubtedly based on a view that we were less than human, and to be managed in the same way as flora and fauna – and a dying species at that.

This brings me to a more recent and proud Australian history. I was extremely very proud to be a part of the audience when the Australian Parliament finally made a formal apology to those of us taken from our families to 'breed out the colour'.

The 'white halo' view of our past that had been pushed for the previous decade was laid to rest and we can move on in the knowledge our experience has been recognised for the disgrace it was. It's important to note too, that the apology provided by Prime Minister Rudd was recommended over ten years ago in the Bringing Them Home Report.

Today, people look at me walking around in my suit and doing my work and wouldn't get close to understanding the grief I carry around in my head every day. I can say now though, that while the apology was a long time in coming, it has for me gone a long way to healing and signals to all of us that it's time to stand proud of our Indigenous heritage.

It's also time to accept the mistakes of the past generations and learn from them and to work together to build a country that acknowledges with pride the fact that this land we now share was carefully and lovingly cared for over many thousands of years before others arrived to settle just over 200 years ago.

It is my hope that Between Two Worlds will assist people's understanding of the Stolen Generations and serve to move this country forward in healing and reconciliation.

I wish you all the best on your 'Journey of Healing'.

Syd Jackson
Member, Stolen Generations Victoria

1. 'Acting White, Feeling Black'

Archie Roach's song *Took The Children Away* captures the Stolen Generations experience in a most heartfelt way. He sings 'we were acting white and feeling black', a line which articulates the feelings of many members of the Stolen Generations. The title of this guide, *Between Two Worlds*, refers to experiences many members felt growing up and continue to struggle with in their adult lives.

Between Two Worlds aims to educate non-Aboriginal service providers about the challenges faced by members of the Stolen Generations. Whether you work in child protection, child and family services, health, mental health, education, housing or the criminal justice system, this guide aims to enhance your understanding, empathy and capacity to work effectively with members of the Stolen Generations.

In 2008, Stolen Generations Victoria consulted members in forums across the state to ascertain their needs and concerns. Many members thought that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities had little understanding of their history, life experiences and current challenges.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's apology on February 13 2008 was a very necessary and long overdue acknowledgement of the injustices of the past. But for some members of the Stolen Generations, an apology is only the first step on a long journey of healing. These journeys need to continue, and we can all support the next steps toward healing.

Between Two Worlds can help you, the reader, to understand the Stolen Generations and thus support the next steps in the journey of healing.



2. Before Colonisation

When Australia was colonised in 1788, the British declared it Terra Nullius – an empty continent. According to British settlers, Aboriginal people did not make use of the land in terms of agriculture, settlements and towns and therefore did not constitute a 'civilisation'.

Accordingly, Aboriginal people were seen to have no economy or social structure. But this was not the case. Approximately 700 different Aboriginal nations, containing various communities, were established across the continent.



Aboriginal communities had a strong 'Web of Life', an integrated social structure reflecting how every aspect of tribal life was connected. Everyone had a role to play, and understood their responsibility to the clan or tribal group. There was no confusion; life within communities was relatively harmonious and everyone knew their place.

Although there were many different Aboriginal cultures and languages, the Aboriginal tribal groups shared specific rules about engagement with others and these rules were accepted and respected by the various groups. They also shared some fundamental principles, including a social commitment to kin and a spiritual connection with the land, embedded in the Dreaming from which values, norms and social-emotional and spiritual well-being were derived.

The economy was based on hunting and gathering, and communities followed a very structured seasonal migration within their territory to make use of the resources it provided. Extremely sophisticated kinship structures and rules governed interpersonal behaviour, marriage and trade, while extraordinarily rich forms of art, dance and music enhanced their lives.

The diagram on the previous page demonstrates the complex relationships that created Aboriginal communities and identities. When these relationships became fractured after colonisation, the tribal structures became fragmented and broke down.

This was a devastating cultural shock to Aboriginal people and their tribal clans. They were forced into a new niche in their own country, whilst they were subjected to disease, rape and murder. This new niche was, and still is, largely defined by the more powerful non-Aboriginal majority.





**Horton Map showing traditional boundaries between Aboriginal groups
(courtesy of AIATSIS)**

3. After Colonisation

Occupation

Europeans had regular contact with Aboriginal peoples in Victoria from the early 1800s. However, it was not until 1834 that farmers from Tasmania colonised Victoria, and in 1837 the town of Melbourne was ordered to be built. By the late 1840s, the majority of land in Victoria had been colonised by Europeans and subsequently, the Aboriginal population declined rapidly.

In 1869 the Victorian Parliament passed the *Aborigines Protection Act*. This Act gave powers to the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines, an extraordinary level of control over Aboriginal people's lives, including regulation of residence, employment, marriage, social life and other aspects of daily life.

Regulations

One of the regulations made under the Act allowed for 'the removal of any Aboriginal child neglected by its parents or left unprotected'. Under this regulation, children were removed to a mission, an industrial or reform school, or a station.

Another regulation allowed the board to remove any male child under 14 years and female child under 18 years living on reserves and to relocate them elsewhere. These powers of removal were even given to station managers.

These regulations were used to separate Aboriginal children from their parents and to house them in dormitories on the reserves at Lake Hindmarsh, Coranderrk, Ramahyuck, Lake Tyers and Lake Condah.



Removals

Between 1887 and 1954, private welfare agencies and individuals were authorised to remove Aboriginal children if they suspected the child was neglected. They could assume guardianship of them or send them to an institution. In 1957, there were at least 68 institutions managed by 44 different private agencies.

As these removals were informal and private, it was very difficult to control. Often, what was at first thought to be temporary assistance with the consent of the parents became an irreversible removal process. The government found it difficult to keep track of these removals, making it near impossible for parents to locate their children.

Adoption laws were also used by individuals to remove children. The *Victorian Adoption of Children Act 1928* allowed anyone to arrange an adoption, so long as the mother consented. Some Aboriginal parents would later find out they had unknowingly agreed to give up their children, when they thought they were placing them in temporary care.

Reserves

Between 1886 and 1923 the number of Aboriginal reserves in Victoria declined from six to one. All Aboriginal people who wished to receive assistance from the Board had to move to Lake Tyers, the only staffed institution after 1924. However, only those considered to be 'full blood' were allowed to reside at Lake Tyers.

'Half-castes' were expected to be assimilated into the 'white' community and were unable to receive any assistance from the government at the time. It was expected that Aboriginal people at Lake Tyers would eventually die, marking the end of the 'Aboriginal problem'. This policy led to many families and communities being separated and resulted in the destruction of Aboriginal kinship networks which for generations had provided strong support for children and families.

Referendum

Following the 1967 referendum, which granted Aboriginal people the right to vote, the Commonwealth Government assumed responsibility of Aboriginal affairs and appointed a Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. Under the amendments to the Commonwealth Constitution, the Minister had the power to review existing laws and policies regarding Aboriginal people living in Victoria.

Self-Determination

Following the federal election in 1972, the assimilation policy that had dominated Aboriginal affairs for 20 years was replaced by a policy of 'self-determination', which is still in effect today.

The policy of self-determination aims to empower Aboriginal people to decide on their own futures. This approach, based on the recognition that Aboriginal people should be actively involved in all decision making that affects their lives, gave rise to the development of many Aboriginal organisations in Victoria.

In the early to mid 1970's a number of Aboriginal services were established by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people in Victoria. Services established at this time include the:

- Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service
- Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
- Victorian Aboriginal Health Service
- Victorian Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
- Victorian Aboriginal Housing Cooperative

These services were formed with the assistance of professionals (lawyers, doctors and dentists), some of whom provided their services free. The efforts of Aboriginal-operated organisations resulted in a 40 per cent reduction in the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care by 1979.



Aboriginal Child Placement Principle

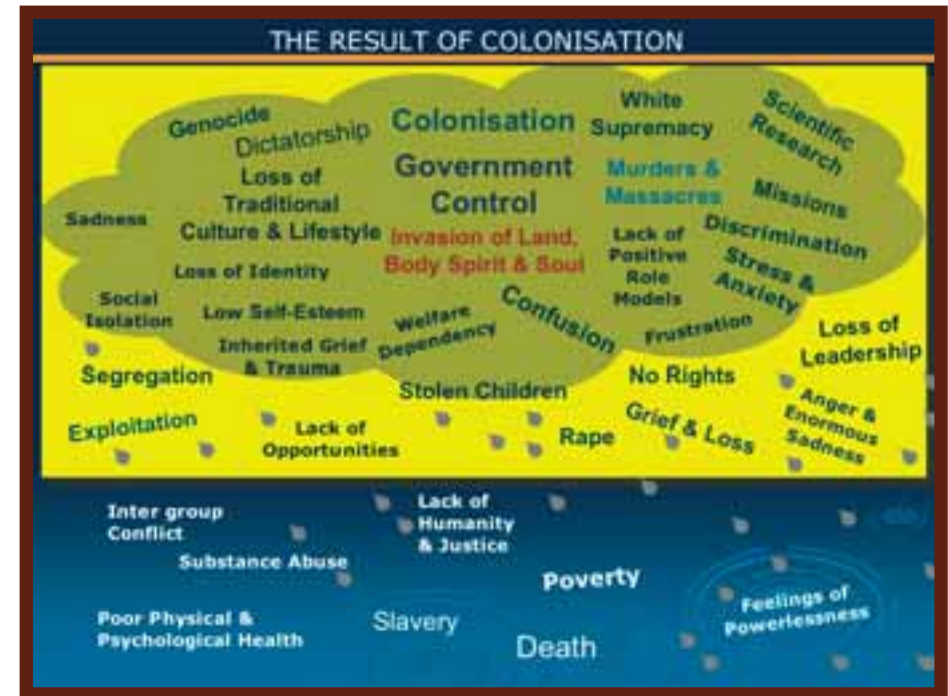
In 1989, the Victorian Government adopted the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle. Under the principle, an Aboriginal family must be the preferred placement for an Aboriginal child in need of alternative care. This is now included in all states' child protection legislation. In Victoria, this is reflected in section 13 of the 2005 *Children Youth and Families Act*. Reports including the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody 1987* and the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families 1997* influenced further policy and program change in Victoria.

In 1997 a bipartisan initiative in the Victorian Parliament saw the passing of a motion of an unreserved apology to Aboriginal people for past government policies of separating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their parents, which was given by then-Premier Jeff Kennett.

The Stolen Generations Today

Today, many Aboriginal people in Victoria are still affected by past child removal policies, either as a first, second or third generation member of the Stolen Generations. Members face a variety of challenges, as do their families and communities.

In 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made a nation-wide apology to the Stolen Generations. While welcomed by many, this apology was not accompanied by adequate reparations, such as compensation. As the Stolen Generations Victoria *Unfinished Business Report* outlines, there is still much that needs to be done to support members of the Stolen Generations.



4. Where did the term 'The Stolen Generations' come from?

The term 'Stolen Generations' has been used for many years to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were separated from their family, community and culture as part of forcible child removal policies. The plural, 'Generations', is used to highlight the length of time, over one hundred years, during which Aboriginal children were taken and to acknowledge that the process caused inter-generational harm.

In 1915, the Honourable P. McGarry, a Member of the Parliament of New South Wales, objected to the *Aborigines Protection Amending Act 1915*. The Act enabled the Aborigines' Protection Board to remove Aboriginal children from their parents without having to establish that they were in any way neglected or mistreated. McGarry described the policy as 'steal[ing] the child away from its parents'.

In 1923, an article in the *Adelaide Sun* stated: 'The word stole may sound a bit far-fetched but by the time we have told the story of the heart-broken Aboriginal mother we are sure the word will not be considered out of place.'

Professor Peter Read, the co founder of Link Up NSW, famously used the phrase 'The Stolen Generations' as the title to a paper first published in 1981. The paper described the forced removal of children from their families in New South Wales from 1883 to 1969. Link-Up NSW was co-founded with Oomera (Coral) Edwards, a member of the Stolen Generations who, with Professor Read, began the service to assist those families separated under the policies of child removal to be reunited with their family members and community.

In 1997 the *Bringing Them Home* report was released. The report was based upon findings of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*. The inquiry investigated numerous cases of forcible child removal around the country. Upon the release of the report, the media began to use the term 'the Stolen Generations' to describe the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and others who told their stories to the Inquiry.

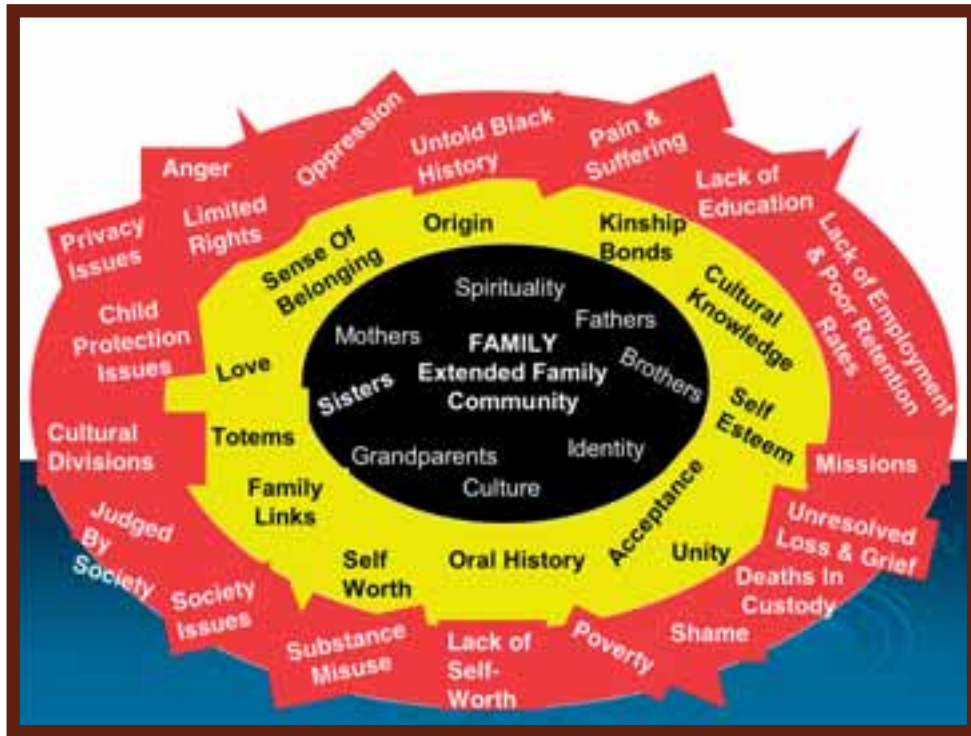
The *Bringing Them Home* report, however, did not use the term 'Stolen Generations' but rather 'forcible removal policies' to identify the authority under which children were removed illegally or through 'compulsion, duress or undue influence'. It must be noted that the term 'Stolen Generations' did not originate in the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities, and consequently, not all people who were taken from their families as a result of past policies are comfortable with this label.

The Victorian Stolen Generations Taskforce, for example, identified that the term 'Stolen Generations' could encompass any number of scenarios related to the removal of children from family and culture, such as forcible removal, relinquishment at birth under duress, removal by deception, being fostered or adopted.

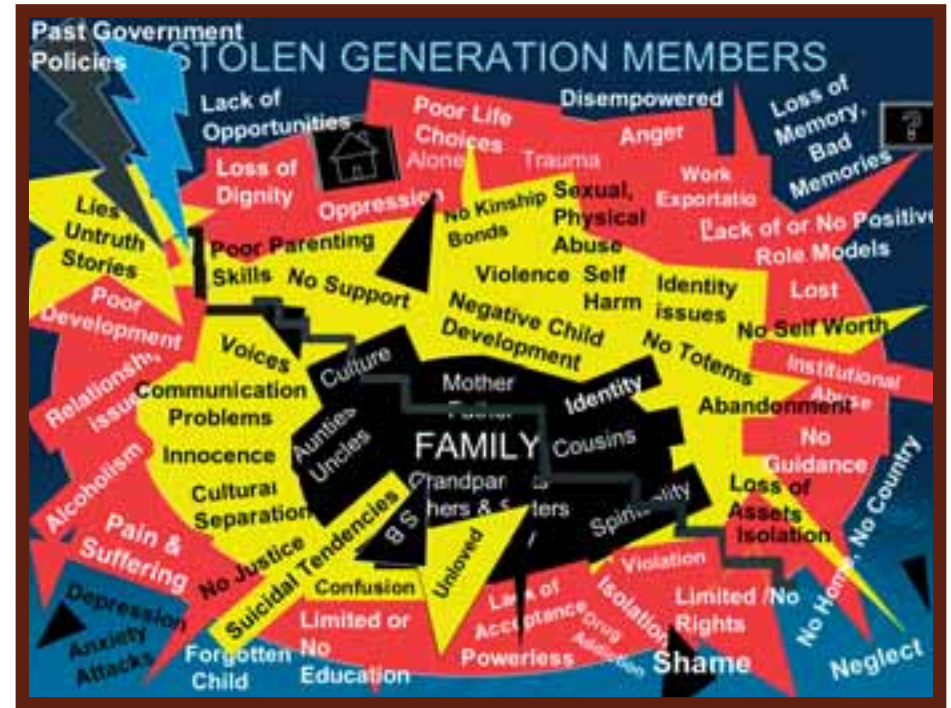
The term 'Stolen' is obviously loaded, and while some children may have been relinquished by their parents, and not 'stolen' per se, it must be recognised that the abject circumstances parents and families often found themselves in were primarily due to their Aboriginality and thus their status as second class citizens.



5. Understanding



Compare the above diagram with the one on the next page. The first diagram represents aspects of life for an Aboriginal person who has been brought up with family, community and culture. While many families face issues of poverty, substance misuse, unemployment and a range of health problems, they also display much strength as a community through cultural pride, connection to culture, family and community, and a sense of spirituality. The following diagram illustrates the complexities members of the Stolen Generations face having been disconnected from family, community and culture.



Without the guidance and wisdom of the Elders and traditional Aboriginal culture, those who were taken away are anchorless, as family and community connections have been shattered for many members of the Stolen Generations. As is now well documented, child development experiences and relationships of attachment within the family, particularly in the first three years of life, significantly impact on an individual's potential and experiences throughout life.

Many members of the Stolen Generations were subject to harmful and traumatic early childhood experiences, which have had ongoing negative impacts on their development opportunities. Continuous loss and grief, including the loss of culture, family and heritage, has led to difficulty in making good decisions and this has had continued detrimental effects on members' lives.



Studies have shown that Aboriginal people who were removed from family, community and culture as children are:

- less likely to have undertaken post-secondary education;
- much less likely to have stable living conditions and more likely to be geographically mobile;
- three times more likely to say they had no-one to call on in a crisis;
- less likely to be in a stable, confiding relationship with a partner;
- twice as likely to report having been arrested by police and having been convicted of an offence;
- three times as likely to report having been in jail;
- less likely to have a strong sense of their Aboriginal cultural identity, more likely to have discovered their Aboriginality later in life and less likely to know about their Aboriginal cultural traditions;
- twice as likely to report current use of illicit substances; and
- much more likely to report intravenous use of illicit substances.

6. Facing the Challenges

Members of the Stolen Generations face a variety of challenges. Below is an outline of some of the difficulties experienced by members throughout their journey of healing. Please note that not all members may face the challenges outlined below.

Coming Forward

Many people who were removed as children have difficulties in coming forward.

For many people who have suffered traumatic experiences, coming forward is difficult. This may be for a range of reasons – shame, confusion, lack of awareness by family and friends, the sense that no one cares or understands. Some people also fear opening that ‘can of worms’ will lead to more heartache.

Many members experienced severe physical and sexual abuse, often at the hands of their carers. The trauma of these experiences may prevent members from coming forward. An abusive history can be difficult to speak about and may underscore other behavioural issues such as aggression or depression.

Often members were expected to deny their Aboriginality as children and were raised with negative perceptions of Aboriginal people which can be difficult to shift, even in adulthood. Alternatively, some members feel a great pride in being Aboriginal, but may not have the means or knowledge to express this.

‘When I fill in a form that has ‘are you Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander’, I put down Stolen Generation member still searching.’ (member of the Stolen Generations)



Lack of Records, Lack of Identity

Members often lack personal records to reinforce identity.

Because individual records were not meticulously kept, especially for Aboriginal children, many members of the Stolen Generations have incomplete, disjointed or no official records, such as birth certificates, parents' marriage certificate, adoption papers and other government records.

Members who have no birth certificate often find it difficult to prove their identity and have had to rely on letters from government authorities to obtain a driver's licence or to get married. This causes many to feel ashamed and adds to the existing layers of grief and loss.

In today's society, not having proof of identity makes it extremely difficult to access essential services. Members who were removed interstate may also have trouble accessing records and obtaining a certificate of Aboriginality within the local community.

Caught Between Two Worlds

Many members describe experiencing identity conflict.

Many members were brought up in a non-Aboriginal family or institution, separated from their Aboriginal family, community, language and culture. For these members there is often a conflict of identity. Many speak of feeling alienated from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal culture; of 'feeling black, acting white, and being neither.'

Often members speak of not being accepted in society because of their Aboriginality, but sadly, are not accepted in the Aboriginal community later in life because they are not 'Aboriginal enough'.

Many members feel it to be an injustice when they are asked to prove their connections to an Aboriginal community, especially if they are often not known by the local community. When this happens communities may not sign off on Aboriginality certificates, leaving members feeling further alienated from their community and culture.

'Proof of Aboriginality is a major issue. Where are you when you don't know who you are?' (Member of the Stolen Generations)

Members also describe the profound disappointment and torment they experience when they finally find their family and community, after what is often a long, emotional process. There is an expectation they will feel an automatic connection, one they have longed for over most of their life. Sometimes they will find that no connection exists - some members even experience outright rejection by the Aboriginal community.

'They should accept us... Why should we have to explain? We were taken, haven't we suffered enough?' (Member of the Stolen Generations)

Inter-generational Impacts

The consequences of removal ripple through the community and through the generations.

The impacts of child removal are not solely limited to first generation members, but affect members' children, grandchildren, families and communities. In particular, the rates of child foster care and adoption are often higher in families which have previously experienced child removal, and members often fear their own children being taken away.

Some members of the Stolen Generations have also discussed how their experiences in institutions or foster homes have made it difficult to engage with their own children, having never experienced a stable or loving home.

'I don't have the history with them, I am related, but I don't have the history, they talk about funny things that had happened in the past and laugh...you know...I can't laugh with them - I wasn't there.' (Member of the Stolen Generations)



Physical and Emotional Health

Life expectancy is 10-12 years shorter for Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal people.

The Aboriginal community experiences a greater prevalence of health problems and poorer health outcomes than the non-Aboriginal community. This includes diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, higher rates of smoking, premature birth, drug and alcohol related problems.

For members of the Stolen Generations, these health issues are often compounded by higher levels of psychological and emotional stress. Depression features prominently among Stolen Generations members and many experience more serious illnesses including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, bi-polar, schizophrenia, anxiety (including panic attacks), dissociation, psychosomatic illnesses and a range of personality disorders. Due to childhood experiences, many members have poor emotional regulatory control, particularly when dealing with anger which can be inappropriately expressed as aggression.

'Stolen Generations members, while not identified as a discrete group, appear to have 'high prevalence' of mental health issues like anxiety, depression, grief, loss as well as substance abuse.' (Government Agency)

Lost Educational and Employment Opportunities

Members may have poor education and employment opportunities due to their experiences.

There is ample evidence to suggest that for a child to succeed in the education system, they need a stable upbringing and grounded schooling. Unfortunately for most members of the Stolen Generations, this did not occur.

Poor or incomplete schooling and an unstable environment leads to decreased job opportunities which, in turn, leads to frustration and even contact with the criminal justice system.

Sustainable job and educational opportunities may be difficult for many members the Stolen Generation to secure due to recurring triggers of past experiences. For example, many members find it difficult to place themselves in an authoritative environment. However, this is not the case for all members of the Stolen Generations, as some feel they benefited from their experiences in the mainstream education system.

Criminal Justice

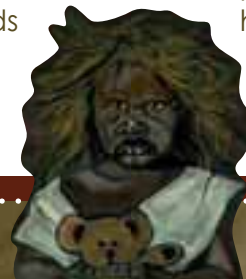
Members may face increased chances of contact with the criminal justice system.

It is interesting to note that the 1997 Bringing Them Home report was commissioned when it was discovered that nearly half of the cases investigated in the 1989 Aboriginal Deaths in Custody report involved people who had been removed from their families as children.

Many members of the Stolen Generations have above-average contact with the criminal justice system. One of the difficulties faced by organisations such as Stolen Generations Victoria is locating and accessing members of the Stolen Generations in the criminal justice system.

'White counsellors don't understand what we are going through.' (incarcerated Member of the Stolen Generations)

Many members of the Stolen Generations suffered as a result of institutionalisation as a children. When these children left the institutions they were expected to live by their own means and to adapt to living in the general community. It is understandable that many members of the Stolen Generations have little regard or respect for 'white authority'. Breaking the law for some is an expression of the anger and injustice members feel. Some members have made the comment, 'at least in prison there is structure, I know what's happening and I have a bed to sleep in and three meals a day. It's okay for a while.'



Complex Problems

Members may experience complex problems such as drug and alcohol, gambling, family violence or anger.

Due to members' life experiences, a range of social and emotional well-being issues may arise, leading to a variety of complex problems, such as family violence, drug and alcohol problems, gambling problems or eating disorders.

'Indigenous people are always disadvantaged in the health system and even more so in mental health, they are disengaged, traumatised, isolated... they need support and care, we need to re-build trust and train workers.'
(Government Agency)

Lack of Justice

Lack of reparations reinforces negative feelings.

Reparations have been granted in some way in the states of Queensland and Tasmania, and are on the way in Western Australia. However, no such reparations or compensation scheme has been put in place in Victoria. The lack of tangible reparations may compound a members' feeling of injustice and low self worth, as this is often perceived as not validating their traumatic experiences.

'I am so sick of getting the run around from services, they do not seem to understand me or the help I need. I can't find the stuff I want or the help I need. How do I work out my problems when the so called professionals don't know what is out there?' (Member of the Stolen Generations).

Members may feel the weight of personal injustice, due to childhood events beyond their control, and these feelings can be compounded by the grief of the past that many Aboriginal people carry. The loss of land, family, language and culture (often in violent ways) combined with experiences of racism and resistance to reparations within Australian society, can infuse members with deep anger and resentment.



7. Practice Considerations

This section applies specifically to health and human service professionals who may come into contact with members of the Stolen Generations in their vocation. What follows are some aspects to take into consideration when working with members.

Service environment and administration.

The first point of contact, whether by phone or in person, is highly important to achieve positive engagement. If the environment is not friendly or is too clinical, a member may not pursue further engagement.

The environment should be made inviting and culturally safe. This may involve the use of cultural posters, good light, an airy room and a plant or flowers for the member to focus on when feeling uncomfortable.

Do not assume members can fill in forms. Members are unlikely to admit openly if they have difficulty reading and writing because they will feel ashamed and embarrassed. Do not ask members if they can read or write. Rather ask them if they would like to fill in the form or would they prefer you to fill it in for them. This way the member is not placed in a shameful situation. Over time you will become aware if they have difficulties in reading or writing.

Be aware of members' perceptions of authority and power.

Given the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people since colonisation, it is not surprising that many have a significant mistrust and resistance toward authority figures. Members of the Stolen Generations have developed defence mechanisms toward those they perceive to have power and authority and this includes counselling services.

Given past experiences of powerlessness, it is imperative for better outcomes that empowerment models are utilised with members. Self-determination and the ability to make informed choices are vital in achieving this.

The importance of follow-up.

There may be a valid reason as to why a member may miss an appointment. It is important to consider how fragile some members feel. There is a risk that if there is no follow-up, this lack of contact may lead a member to feel 'you do not care', that they are once again considered just a number within a system and any positive progress may be lost.

Even after a member makes a decision to no longer attend sessions, a quick follow up call if possible can assist with the member's self-worth. Continuity is important.

Once you build a relationship it is important to consider the impact moving on may have on the member. Changeover of personnel should be kept to a minimum but where it is inevitable, a transition to the new worker should be done gradually and sensitively. Having to repeat their story should be minimised for members.

Be accountable; follow through.

If you tell a member that you are going to contact them on a particular day, contact them on that day. It is important to follow through with what you say. Most members will expect you to keep your word. Remember they may feel they have been let down all their lives.

Avoid jumping to conclusions or assumptions from your observations.

Lack of eye contact does not necessarily mean that the member is not cooperating or listening to you. It can be seen as a sign of respect or the member does not feel confident to have eye contact, which can be personal or cultural.



Give Members time to answer your questions.

Sometimes there may be periods of silence in the conversation. This may not mean that the member did not hear. They may need time to respond. Silence can mean they are thinking. Allow the member time to answer questions and share their stories; they may not like being rushed. This does not mean they are slow, disabled or evasive. The term 'silence is golden' is beneficial when working with members of the Stolen Generations.

When working with Elders.

Many Elders like to be referred to as Aunty or Uncle instead of Miss, Mr or Mrs. Some may prefer the latter and others may be comfortable with both. If in doubt, ask.

Avoid using Aboriginal English.

Aboriginal English is the term given to the various kinds of English spoken by Aboriginal people throughout Australia. Aboriginal English is a powerful tool used for expression of Aboriginal identity and may be seen to be offensive if non-Aboriginal people use it when speaking to an Aboriginal person.

Accept every Stolen Generations member as an individual.

Not all members have the same life experiences, perspectives, values and beliefs.

Take time out.

Get rid of any expectations or assumptions you may have. Try to greet each member with a clear mind. Remember you're there for them. Do not be elsewhere; members will pick this up and you will lose them.

Be calm in yourself.

A member will quickly tune into your feelings and may respond differently if you are uncomfortable within yourself. Members are extremely sensitive people; this is a lifelong survival technique that many members have learnt.

Watch your body language.

Aboriginal people will take notice of your body language more than your words. If there is incongruence between your body language including your facial expressions members will 'listen' to what they see more than what they hear.

Ways in which mainstream health professionals can contribute towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health needs, including Stolen Generations members:

- Attend cross-cultural workshops
- Develop creative ways to involve Aboriginal people in existing health programs and projects
- Sharing of resources and skills to Aboriginal community health programs
- Take steps to improve accessibility to mainstream health programs
- Build a partnership with an Aboriginal organisation and Aboriginal workers, this can take time and effort but will be highly valuable
- Attend and become involved in Indigenous celebrations such as National Sorry Day, NAIDOC Week and Reconciliation Week
- Educate work colleagues



8. Working Together

If you are working with a member of the Stolen Generations you may also need to guide their partner or family in their support of the member. The information below may be helpful for partners and children of members of the Stolen Generations.

Everyone in the community can help a member of the Stolen Generations. However, it is recognised that the impacts of this legacy has a broader impact for the Aboriginal community or family of the member of the Stolen Generations.

Below are some thoughts on how different people can assist members in their journey of healing, realising that the journey may be long in years and difficult in nature.

If you are a partner

Be prepared to listen and seek support.

Partners of Stolen Generations members often experience the difficulties and challenges members face first hand. Given the experiences of removal and living in an institutional environment, or sometimes an abusive foster care or adoption situation, many members find it very difficult to form and maintain stable, loving relationships.

Members may have major issues with trust, rejection and abandonment and will often subconsciously push a loved one away in order to 'hurt and reject before they are hurt and rejected.' Many members find it difficult to say 'I love you'. This does not mean they don't love you. This can be because no-one ever expressed love or kindness to them as a child. Many members find it difficult to hug, to hold, to touch. With support, gentle guidance, time and respect, these issues may be overcome.

Understand this and don't react to the behaviour but maintain a controlled and safe response with your partner. Always be prepared to listen to your partner's fears and anxieties. It may also assist you to seek support yourself, which will enable you to respond in a more helpful way to the member.

'The issues of the birth and adoptive family are also not recognised, and are still a major issue. Silence is a huge factor in communities where families do not want to talk about what has gone on.' (Indigenous Service Provider)

Many partners want to rescue their partner (member of Stolen Generation) and feel a need to make things better; they tend to feel hopeless if they cannot, which can lead to frustration and anger if not resolved. In anger, hurtful words can be spoken. The best way you can support your partner is provide them an opportunity to vent their issues and concerns. This may seem repetitive but allowing them to get things off their chest is all that's required most of the time.

Some members can express more feelings of love to their children than to their partner. This can be because the child is a part of them that they can love unconditionally. This can change, however, as the child grows and the Stolen Generation parent is confronted with difficult childhood behaviour and adolescence.



If you are second generation member *(a child of a Stolen Generations member)* Many members of the Stolen Generations often find it difficult to express their feelings to their own children.

Many members of the Stolen Generations were raised in institutions or families without love and care and often experienced both sexual and physical abuse. The result is that members may find it difficult to express love and care toward their own children. This does not mean that, as a child of a member of the Stolen Generations, your parent does not love you. It only means that at times your parent will experience difficulty in demonstrating this love and care.

Most members are very hard on themselves, always telling themselves what a 'bad' parent they are and rarely feeling good about themselves in this role. Many members have high expectations of themselves and if things go wrong they often blame their own parenting which has been compromised by not having a positive parental role model themselves.

Due to relationship breakdowns, many members feel they have no-one to confide in about parenting and making decisions for their child, so they just fumble their way through parenting. This can lead to more devastating consequences such as break-down of the relationship between parent and child. This is why it is important for you to be open to seeking help.

Firstly, know and believe that you are loved despite the lack of demonstration. Let your mum or dad know that you understand their life experiences have been hard. If you can, tell them what you need from them and work slowly toward this or ask for advice from a trusted Elder, family member or friend.

Seek support to help you better understand and manage how your parent's behaviour impacts on you. Be prepared: this may involve 'one step forward, two steps back' and despite all the will in the world, your parent(s) may just find it all too hard and confronting.

If you are a member of the Aboriginal community

Understand that members may lack awareness of Aboriginal culture and community through no fault of their own.

Unfortunately, and through no fault of their own, members of the Stolen Generations did not learn about their culture and community growing up, but generally would very much like to learn and understand this.

Understand that many members of the Stolen Generations feel 'on the outer' both in the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. This leaves them feeling isolated and alone.

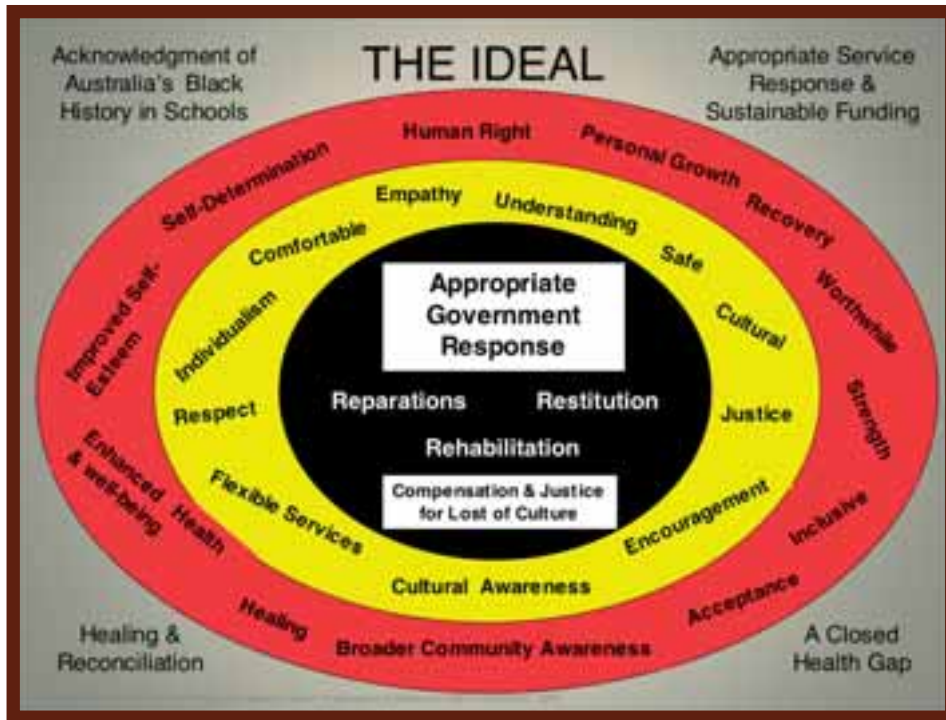
Do not judge them for not knowing community lingo, protocols or the answer to questions like 'who's your mob' or 'what's your totem?' Members need considerable understanding and support and not to be made to feel like a 'Johnny come lately'.

'The whole Aboriginal Community need to take on and consider the issues around the people who are seeking their identity. Aboriginality can be very contentious in some communities, we need to arrive at a place of acceptance.'
(Indigenous Service Provider)

'I don't get accepted because I don't use the right words like Aunty, Uncle, Cuz, sis, bro, deadly, yarnin', and so on... I was also told I don't swear properly – the Koori way.' *(Member of the Stolen Generation)*



9. The Way Forward



The ideal way forward is an integrated, holistic whole-of-government response that will achieve systemic change. Since colonisation the damage done to Aboriginal people has been devastating.

The above diagram titled 'The Ideal', shows the centre, which represents the past, present and future and our identity. It also outlines the required actions to assist members of the Stolen Generations and the broader Aboriginal communities across Australia to heal.

'Experiencing belonging – knowing where and with whom you belong – is integral to human existence. Children belong first to a family, a cultural group, a neighbourhood and a wider community.'

Belonging acknowledges children's interdependence with others and the basis of relationships in defining identities. In early childhood, and throughout life, relationships are crucial to a sense of belonging. Belonging is central to being and becoming in that it shapes who children are and who they can become.'

These words are taken from the government publication, *The Early Years Learning Framework* published in 2009. The paragraphs above express current government policy in relation to the importance of children having a sense of belonging.

It is also a timely message in our work with members of the Stolen Generations. As government policy in previous times did not understand this crucial human need, the results of past policies and injustices still permeate today.

If your work with members of the Stolen Generations is based on an understanding of the range of issues as outlined in this guide, then the journey of healing will continue. You can play a crucial role in assisting and guiding a member's journey of healing, and with that, the healing of our nation.

For further advice and support in your work with members please contact the staff at Stolen Generations Victoria.



10. Further Information

Bringing Them Home Counsellor Program

The Bringing Them Home Counsellor Program funds over 100 counsellors nationally to provide counselling to individuals and families, and related services to communities affected by past practices of forced removal of children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

In Victoria there are 15 Bringing Them Home workers who are based at Aboriginal Cooperatives across the state. The sites for these workers are:

Bairnsdale: 37-53 Dalmohay Street (03) 5150 3115

Ballarat: Cnr Market and Station St (03) 5331344

Bendigo: (03) 5442 4947

Dandenong: 3 Carrol St (03) 9794 1247

Echuca: McKinlay St Echuca (03) 5480 6566

Fitzroy: 186 Nicholson St (03)9419 3000

Geelong: Lot 62 Morgan Rd (03) 5277 0044

Hamilton: 19 Segwick St (03) 5571 9780

Healesville: Shop 2/297 Maroodah Highway 1300 130 381

Heywood: 21 Scott St (03) 5527 2051

Horsham: 43 Hamilton St (03) 5381 6333

Lake Tyres: Lake Tyres Aboriginal Trust (03) 5156 5554

Mildura: 120 Madden Avenue (03) 5023 0893

Morwell: 7-9 Buckley St (03) 5136 5100

Portland: Julia St (03) 5521 7535

Robinvale: 3 Latie Rd (03) 5023 3353

Sale: 117 Foster St (03) 5143 1644

Shepparton: 20 Rumbalara Rd (03) 5825 2111

Swan Hill: 70 Nyah Rd (03) 5032 5277

Warrnambool: Harris Reserve (03) 5564 3333

Link -Up

The Link-Up Program funds 11 services across the country to provide support, guidance and assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people forcibly removed from their families and communities to trace, locate and reunite with their families. Link-Up in Victoria is based at the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency.

Contact Link Up in Victoria:

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency Co-operative Ltd
139 Nicholson St
East Brunswick Victoria 3057

PO Box 494
Northcote Plaza
Northcote Victoria 3070

Tel: (03) 8388 1855
Fax: (03) 8388 1898
Email: vacca@vacca.org



Koorie Family History Service

The Koorie Family History Service (KFHS) was launched in 2000 and is based at the Koori Heritage Trust in Melbourne. The aim of the KFHS (which incorporates the Recorded Testimonies Project) is to establish a community-based service to assist members of the Stolen Generations and Indigenous communities to trace their family history and access records.

This service has assisted Link-Up and BTH Workers regarding family tracing and reunions. They also visit members of the Stolen Generations in prison and aim to assist incarcerated members with family tracing, by providing information and education. They do not provide in-depth counselling or case management.

Contact Koori Family History Service:

Koorie Heritage Trust
295 King Street
Melbourne
Victoria 3000

Tel: (03) 8622 2600
Fax: (03) 9602 4333

Web: www.koorieheritagetrust.com

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Connecting Home